

News Release

Bright Future Ahead for Natural Resource Jobs Say National Experts

By Dan Svedarsky on Tuesday, November 8, 2005

Crookston, MN—The Brandwein Institute recently invited 80 leaders to the National Conservation Learning Summit at the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Training Center in Shepardstown, West Virginia. The tasks were to explore how to meet the future government employment needs for natural resource professionals and how to get the public to care more about conservation of natural resources. Agencies charged with managing America's renewable natural resources are facing an unprecedented challenge due to huge changes in the workforce because of coming retirements. Interestingly, both science and conservation literacy in U. S. secondary schools and in the general population are at an all-time low.

“An amazing figure is that 82% of the entire federal workforce (Job Rating of GS-9 and above) will be eligible to retire in the next 5 years,” according to Robert Brown, attendee and President of The Wildlife Society. “In natural resources, projections indicate as many as 50 - 70% of federal biologists will be eligible to retire in the next 3 - 10 years. Eighty percent of the U.S. Forest Service can retire in the next 4 years. Others project that 77% of conservation agencies' senior leadership will be gone in less than 10 years, and that 60% can retire in 2007.”

At the same time, college enrollment in natural resources, conservation, and environmental sciences tends to be declining. This is especially true in forestry, range management, and soils. It is believed this is due to few jobs posted in the past and the general trend of the public away from personal experiences with nature. There is also concern about the low enrollment of minorities in these fields, since agencies feel their workforce should mirror that of the population they serve.

Agency representatives at the Summit raised concerns about the abilities of the graduates they are hiring. Many at the Bachelor's level know theoretical science, but little about practical management. They have no practical farm, ranch, or timber management experience, and they don't know how to talk with landowners. There is concern that universities are producing generalists, especially in the areas of environmental science and conservation biology, rather than graduates who know how to do something on the ground. “This is precisely why we continue to emphasize hands-on natural resource programs with required internships at the University of Minnesota, Crookston, says Dan Svedarsky, Head of the Natural Resources Department and also Vice-President of The Wildlife Society. “There is still the misconception out there that there are no jobs in natural resources but it's simply not true, especially if students do well academically, complete work experiences, have good communication skills, and can apply land management techniques in the field.”

Federal agencies have a number of solutions for recruiting high school and college students into the professions, training new young professionals once they are hired, attracting minorities into the profession, and educating school kids and the public about conservation issues, but there is limited coordination among them. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) now has a 6-week “conservation boot camp” for all new employees, regardless of level of education, at selected sites across the country. Participants not only review the history and mission of the NRCS, and the basics of soil science, but they team up with local farmers to become comfortable talking to them and learning to see the work through the eyes of a landowner.

Universities have an especially critical role to play in this workforce challenge since they recruit and educate students, provide agency in-service training, and further resource management science. In addition to providing traditional background courses in a particular discipline, universities must ensure that graduates; are good communicators, can work in teams, embrace a diverse constituency, are technologically proficient, have competency in conflict resolution, can think critically, and are prepared to become life-long learners to keep pace with a rapidly changing work place.

Meeting the natural resource management needs of the present and the future will necessitate a highly coordinated effort between public agencies, private management organizations, and educational institutions. Competing uses for limited natural resources will become more intense as human populations and special interest groups increase. Employment opportunities, however, will be quite good for those natural resource graduates with the full skill set needed to work with a variety of publics and resource uses.

For more information contact:
W. Daniel Svedarsky, University of Minnesota, Crookston
218-281-8129 dsvedars@mail.crk.umn.edu

News Categories

[Department - Agriculture and Natural Resources](#)

Tweet

Like 0

Share

News Home

News Archives



Small Campus. Big Degree..

- Employment

Events Calendar

Academic Calendar

Library

Directories

Maps, Directions & Parking

Quick Facts

Bookstore

- Faculty & Staff

Email & Calendar

Contact Webmaster

System Website

Home

2900 University Ave., Crookston, MN 56716
800-862-6466 | 218-281-6510 | umcinfo@umn.edu

© 2021 Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights reserved.
The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.
[Privacy Statement](#)

